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# Language Classrooms: Laboratories of Soft Skills

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## Abstract:

NEP 2020 is designed in such a manner to make students more employable; the focus of NEP 2020 is more on bridging the gap between industry and academia. Syllabi are framed by the demands of the fast-changing employment market. At the same time when India has the largest number of youth population, the problem of proper skill set needed to be addressed at the right time. With the implementation of NEP 2020 having a major focus on the advancement of the skill set of students, the government, and the system have taken a step forward. Now it is high time for the language teaching fraternity to grab this opportunity and convert language and literature classrooms into more conducive and inclusive environments, where students will spend quality time in the company of rich treasure of world literature which will further help them to assimilate, inculcate the skill set necessary for them to be successful in every arena of the life.

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**Keywords:** NEP – New Education Policy; Soft Skills – How people behave and interact in various situations, mostly unmeasurable unlike hard skills; Employment Market – Current employment opportunities in India and abroad

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## Introduction:

NEP 2020 is designed in a manner to make students more employable; the focus of NEP 2020 is more on bridging the gap between industry and academia. Syllabi are framed in accordance with the demands of the fast-changing employment market. One more key feature of NEP 2020 is the weightage accorded in the syllabus for the development of soft skills among the students. This valuable suggestion was also from the industry fraternity as the students who stepped out of the college or university campus, ready to be absorbed in the job market, surely had subject knowledge but they lagged in the arena of soft skills. It was proved that hard skills in the form of degrees and certificates which students achieved through strenuous efforts and intensive studies in the classrooms, failed to develop their humane aspect or merely shape their human form.

## Historical Background:

Mechanization, digitalization, computerization, internet, web space, software, apps, cell phones though made our life easier and comfortable, at the same juncture these human inventions engrossed, and engulfed human life to the extent, that human beings created new spaces among themselves, which couldn't be bridged by these machines and technology. Actually, these human bridges were built earlier in the invisible laboratories of soft skills in the form of joint families, close and homogeneous groups of relatives, friends, colleagues, and neighbors.



**Current Scenario:**

With the advancement of technology, messages reach the nook and corner of the world within a nanosecond but they lost the feel of the humane touch in the form of pats on the back by the elderly and high five with the friends and colleagues. Social media friendship though crossed the mark of 1K or 10K, it lost the comfort of close hugs and handshakes in case of dilemma and doubts. The consolation, guidance, and advice by the elderly are lost, though the rooms in the apartment have increased, that proximity in the small spaces where every child learned the skills knowingly or unknowingly has become a history or the topic of the blogs to be posted. Bedtime narration and reading of the stories by grandparents or parents are replaced by web series on tablets or daily soaps on televisions. Lullabies of the mother in her voice have been evaded by YouTube videos and Instagram reels. Google, and Chatbots, now have replaced live teachers, counselors, mentors, and guides.

**Education System and Employment Market:**

Fortunately, schools and colleges are still running and students are attending them physically. Although language classrooms are mostly neglected by the parents as well students focus more on the subjects of science and technology as they are hopeful that investment in those classes will repay them in monetary forms in the end. But as mentioned earlier these techno-savvy youths having great domain knowledge are still fumbling and stumbling to get employment or are not able to cope with the work culture in the companies. Therefore, job aspirants, employees, employers, the industrial sector, and ultimately the nation are suffering due to the lack of proper soft skill sets among the youth in India.

**Focus of NEP 2020:**

At the same when India has the largest number of youth population, this problem of proper skill set needed to be addressed at the right time. With the implementation of NEP 2020 having a major focus on the advancement of the skill set of students, the government, and the system have taken a step forward. Now it is high time for the language teaching fraternity to grab this opportunity and convert language and literature classrooms into more conducive and inclusive environment where students will spend quality time in the company of rich treasure of world literatures which further will help them to assimilate, to inculcate the skill set necessary for the youth to be successful in every arena of life be it personal, social, psychological, financial, political etc. And he/she will become global responsible citizens of the global world who will strive for the sustainable development in order to live a happy and contented life in this connected world.

Literature is immortal and universal and at the same time due to the messages, teaching, advice, morals and values, aesthetic appeal (the beauty of the words and forms), etc. in all kinds of literature, it is forever young, alive, beautiful, and universally true. The lessons learned by the characters through their life journey, sufferings, failures, or victories are the beacons for the readers and audience.



### **New Role of Language Classrooms: Laboratories of Soft Skills:**

Hence language classrooms should not only stick to their former traditional pattern of teaching LSRW skills, grammatical skills, effective communication and presentation skills, vocabulary building, etc. but in addition to this teachers can focus on fetching students' attention to interpersonal skills, time management skills, leadership and team building skills, empathy skills, critical thinking skills, problem-solving skills, creative thinking skills, adaptability, conflict resolution, active listening skills, decision making, cultural competence, flexibility, goal setting, negotiation, patience, persuasion, positive attitude, problem analysis, crisis management, self-motivation, stress management, trustworthiness, diversity and inclusion, enthusiasm, patriotism, integrity, humility, taking initiative, innovation, resilience, strategic thinking, following work ethics, etc. The list is unending. However, the formula is simple and feasible in language classrooms.

### **Role of Literature in Acquisition of Soft Skills:**

All forms of literature including major and minor forms like poetry, short stories, novels, plays, one-act plays, essays, etc. are power-packed with all the set of soft skills discussed earlier. The role of the language and literature teacher in the classroom will be in addition to focusing and concentrating on the development of linguistic, grammatical, and LSRW skills of the students, the teacher has to purposely discuss and elaborate the soft skills to the students with the help of short stories, novels, plays, poems and the major and minor characters, their journey of life, the lessons they have learned through the problems they have faced. Soft skills can also be illustrated with the help of the themes or denotative and connotative meanings of the literary piece.

Literature can be a powerful tool for teaching and enhancing soft skills in a way that is both engaging and insightful. Through character development, plot progression, and thematic exploration, literature offers readers (students in particular in this context) the unique opportunity to observe, analyze, and learn various soft skills indirectly. A set of soft skills can be acquired through all forms of literature.

### **Poetry:**

'Sonnet 29' by William Shakespeare which talks about the common human trait of comparison and ignorance about self-possession can be used to teach the soft skills like critical thinking, self-motivation and optimistic attitude. Ninety-nine percent of the time throughout the day we are thinking about other people, on the contrary we should convert the thought process towards self-development by critically thinking or doing SWOC analysis. The teacher can explain to the students by giving the example of the protagonist from the sonnet who realizes at the end that his beloved is an invaluable treasure with him and that is his self-motivation to lead his life positively. The poems like 'Caged Bird' by Maya Angelou a metaphorical commentary about the racism, color discrimination, and slavery practices in America teach the students soft skills of equality, diversity and inclusion, cultural competence, etc.



### **Essays:**

The essay 'On Saying Please' by A.G. Gardiner will help the teacher in the classroom to elaborate the soft skills like humility, courtesy, and effective communication skills in all walks of life. Two incidents are discussed in the essay by the author, the first one is when the passenger is punched by the liftman for not saying 'Please' and the second incident is when the bus conductor helps the narrator when he had forgotten his wallet at home, both the incidents can be used as an eye opener for the students to teach the importance of proper use of words to make communication effective as well the importance of soft skills like humility and courtesy in one's life which makes our personal and social life healthy and happy.

### **One-Act Plays**

One-act plays like, 'The Swan Song' by Anton Chekov talk about the tragic ending of the stage actor in the theatre after giving his last performance on a bitterly cold night. The play conveys the soft skill of goal setting and prioritization and its importance in one's life. The one-act play 'Monkey's Paw' by W.W. Jacobs is a warning bell against lust and ill fate, nothing in life is free, we have to pay for everything in some form or other. It imbibes soft skills like problem analysis, and crisis management on the minds of the students.

### **Short Stories:**

The story 'Romance of a Busy Broker' which is an apt commentary on the effect of industrialization on the life of a New York Broker can be used to teach the students the importance of Time Management as well as balance between Professional and Personal Life. The story 'The Thief' by Ruskin Bond transforms the life of the thief, Hari due to the honesty, pure heart, and kindness of his master Arun. He understands at the end of the story, the importance of education and honesty in life. This story will easily imbibe the importance of soft skills like trustworthiness, work ethics, humility, truth, honesty, integrity, cooperation, empathy, decision-making, etc. A short story, 'A Lesson in Humility' by Sudha Murthy in which Sudha Murthy herself learned a lesson, 'There is Grace in accepting too', teaches the soft skills of humbleness, empathy, cultural competence, and negotiation.

**Novels:** "Lord of the Flies" by William Golding, a novel that explores different leadership styles and the dynamics of group leadership under stress imbibes the leadership and management skills on the minds of the students.

The novel, "The Kite Runner" by Khaled Hosseini, a profound narrative that offers deep insights into the complexities of friendship, betrayal, redemption, and the capacity for empathy can be used to narrate the importance of empathy skills to the students.

"Pride and Prejudice" by Jane Austen offers lessons in misunderstanding, miscommunication, and the resolution of personal and social conflicts through the lens of romantic and familial relationships. In "The Alchemist" by Paulo Coelho, through the journey of the protagonist, readers learn about the importance of self-discovery, and perseverance, and how facing personal conflicts can lead to fulfilling one's destiny. Both these novels can be used to teach a very important soft skill to the students which is conflict resolution.



**Plays:** Girish Karnad's many plays reflect on the power and limitations of language as a means of communication. He examines how language shapes individual and collective identities, as well as the barriers it creates between people from different linguistic backgrounds. So, students through these plays acquire the soft skills of effective communication and presentation. Karnad also addresses the issues of social justice and marginalization, highlighting the plight of marginalized communities and individuals. He advocates for equality, inclusivity, and the recognition of the rights and dignity of all members of society. So, through these plays' students absorb the soft skills of inclusion, integrity, and resilience.

**Conclusion:**

These works of literature discussed above as examples, among others, serve as both compelling stories and valuable resources for personal development. They allow readers to experience and understand the complexities of human behavior and relationships, fostering a deeper appreciation and mastery of soft skills in real-life situations.

Thus, language classrooms should not just stick to their traditional roles but act as catalyst or soft skill laboratories where students will gain the set of soft skills which will lead them to the path of success and put them in 'Win Situation' in near future in personal as well as professional sphere.

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